

The “Arab Spring” in the Middle East and northern Africa has dominated the foreign affairs’ headlines over the past several months and understandably so. The widespread push for freedom and human rights is a remarkable development in a region beset with dictatorships and oppression. The democratic movements in these countries can create chaos and instability in the short term, and the United States is limited in our ability to bring about positive reforms. But I believe history shows that expanding democratic principles to oppressed nations will, over time, enhance stability abroad and strengthen our national security.

I am concerned, however, that the intense focus on the Arab Spring has diverted the international community’s focus on the escalating threat posed by Iran. In May, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran has made significant increases in the production rate of low enriched uranium. It also cited “current undisclosed nuclear related activities involving military related organizations, including activities related to the development of nuclear payload for a missile.” Likewise, British Foreign Secretary William Hague recently observed that it would take Iran only two to three months to convert the uranium to weapons-grade material, and, as reported by the Washington Post, he told the British Parliament that Iran has been secretly testing medium-range missiles capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. Meanwhile, the U.S. military is deeply concerned about deadly attacks against U.S. troops in southern Iraq that are initiated or otherwise supported by Iranian agents.

I’m encouraged that the sanctions passed by Congress in 2010 have substantially reduced foreign investment into Iran’s economy, undermining their nuclear program. But the unfortunate reality is that the current sanctions scheme apparently is not enough to prevent Iran from marching toward the development of a nuclear weapon and a missile that can launch it. The Iranian threat is escalating and must not be ignored. I urge the Obama Administration to explicitly and repeatedly condemn Iran’s hostile activities and to keep this major challenge on the front burner of the international community. Further, I believe U.S. troops in Iraq must continue to have the authority to protect themselves against Iranian-backed attacks. The Administration should also provide all appropriate assistance to the democratic movement in Iran. Because Iran’s nuclear program severely threatens U.S. troops and our national security, I also continue to believe the United States should keep all options on the table to prevent Iran from producing a nuclear weapon.